

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION**

On page 4, please amend the paragraph beginning at line 17 as follows:

~~Experiments~~ Experiments and investigations were initially conducted to develop ways to protect low-k dielectric materials from degradation during barrier metal layer deposition when implementing Cu interconnect a technology. Initial attempts focused on providing a silicon nitride liner. However, it was difficult to deposit an extremely thin silicon nitride film in a conformable manner. Moreover, silicon nitride exhibits an undesirably high dielectric constant, which is antithetic to the demands for increased operating speed.